

TITLE: The International Luncheon

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~*Recipe for esprit de corps*

THE INTERNATIONAL LUNCHEON

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It is one of CIA's best-kept secrets and one of the best luncheons in Washington. It comes along only once a year but has such a devoted clientele that it has been operating under the same management for more than a quarter of a century. One of its chief attractions is the extraordinary range of the kitchen staff. The last luncheon, for example, offered more than five dozen dishes drawn from the culinary repertoire of over 30 nations.

Getting a chance to savor this lucullan fare is tougher than getting a table at Le Pavillon or Lion d'Or on a Saturday night. For this event you need a security clearance as well as a personal invitation to get past the *maitre de'hotel*. Finally, if eavesdropping on one's fellow diners is one of your delights in eating out, don't plan on that in this place unless you're fluent in Turkish, Danish, Laotian, or a host of other foreign tongues.

As the last clue may have made clear, this "restaurant review" is about the International Luncheon thrown by the Agency's Language School each December. This gala affair is not to be compared with the normal run of Christmas parties. Certainly, nothing this reporter has witnessed in Langley's corridors and offices has attempted so much in the scope and sophistication of its cuisine.

The sponsors do not see the International Luncheon as a Christmas party because the multiplicity of religious faiths and ethnic traditions represented in the Language School's faculty makes such a focus inappropriate. It is, instead, a sort of celebration of the winter solstice and of the unique *esprit de corps* that characterizes this special part of CIA, the Language Training Division, Office of Training and Education.

History

The history of this event goes back to the early 1960s when the then Language and Area Studies Division was ensconced in the Arlington Towers complex. Working conditions there were less than ideal and the luncheon was conceived both as a morale booster and a means of building some bonding among the hard-pressed students and instructors. It was a small affair, no admission fee was charged, and the participants took "pot luck" on what their more culinarily talented colleagues could provide. But the key idea of featuring the foods of many lands was operative from the outset.

With the Language School's transfer to the Chamber of Commerce Building (now the (b)(3)(c)), significant growth occurred in the faculty, curriculum, and student body. And with these changes the International Luncheon grew both in its importance to the school and in what it attempted to achieve. Today the faculty includes over instructors representing more than 40 nationalities. The luncheon has become a primary means for building familiarity and cooperation among teachers separated not only by background, but by an increasing workload dealt with in separate departments.

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Doubtless there are many valid explanations for what makes this party tick, but the common denominator for everyone seems to be the quality of the food. At the 1985 party, there was the usual bewildering array of dishes and, try as he might, this reporter * did not sample everything in sight. Still, a goodly portion of this groaning board was tested and what follow are some highlights from one man's point of view. This list of ten dishes will at least provide a flavor, no pun intended, of the variety and excellence available at this unique occasion:

- Herring (Sweden)—made unique by presentation in a curry sauce.
- Rice Noodles (Philippines)—a pasta to rival the best of Italy,
- Fresenjan (Iran)—chicken with rice and a particularly piquant sauce.
- Frijoles (Guatamala)—not your usual Tex-Mex beans.
- Paella (Spain)—made spectacular by service with a whole lobster.
- Janson's Temptation (Sweden)—sliced potatoes and onions baked with anchovies; super!
- Lengua (Bolivia)—beef tongue, but certainly not in the bland English style.
- Babarrois (Chile)—creamy, soft dessert combining mocha and melon flavors.
- Sweetheart Pudding (Portugal)—another delicious, soft-textured dessert.
- Pudim Romy (Brazil)—fruits, nuts and cream in a cheerful, crunchy blend.

This expansion also has forced the exclusion of the student body from the luncheon and the guest list typically is limited to a handful of the most senior Agency officials such as the DCI and the Deputy Director for Administration. Even these worthies were not included at the most recent luncheon, however, in part because experience has shown that the heavy responsibilities they bear often necessitate a late arrival. Keeping 50 dishes warm and 100 diners patient while waiting for "les elephants" is a formidable task even for this resourceful group.

Anecdotes

Some of the Agency's foremost leaders have participated in this affair, however, and endeared themselves to the faculty. The recently retired Deputy Director for Administration, Harry Fitzwater, is fondly remembered not only

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CONFIDENTIAL

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Luncheon

for his appreciation of the fare but for his virtuosity on the ukulele and an annual rendering of a song called "Kangaroo Stew." The current DCI was the first to attend the luncheon with his spouse. Mrs. Casey shared the Director's admiration for the food and was so enamored of a Nicaraguan shrimp salad that she asked for the recipe.

Perhaps the best leadership anecdote concerns former DDCI Lieutenant General Vernon Walters, now serving as the US Ambassador to the United Nations. Walters was a great favorite not only for the spirited manner in which he entered into these occasions, but for his mastery of so many languages. At one luncheon he found the food so spectacular that before leaving he asked for a plate to be made up for his driver. On returning to the car, General Walters handed the plate to the chauffeur, saying: "Here, you eat; I'll drive."

Ultimately, the luncheon matters most to the faculty of the Language School and it is their recollections of this evolving celebration that are the most revealing. Old timers note that, although the quality and variety of the cooking improves steadily each year, other aspects of the event have fluctuated significantly over time. In the 1970s, for example, there was a strong emphasis on faculty members bringing seasonal decorations and wearing costumes from their native lands. Last year only a few donned traditional foreign garb. Even so, memories still linger of former School Chief (b)(3)(c) dressed as a Polish peasant, of festive holiday dresses from Holland borrowed from the Dutch embassy here, and of the Greek annuitant who came in costume and danced like Zorba.

Planned entertainment is another facet of the luncheon which has waxed and waned over the years. The menu/program for the 1980 celebration, for example, begins with a costume parade representing the garb of a dozen nations and continues with songs and dances from France, Sweden, Germany, Greece, Thailand, Chile, Paraguay, and Mexico. At a more recent luncheon—and despite the assertion that this event is not a Christmas party—a faculty group sang "Silent Night" in a presentation made more moving because it was rendered in multiple languages. Skits also have figured prominently at past luncheons including one at which a mock language test was administered to the audience.

The recent trend is toward a less structured party, fewer guests, and more spontaneous entertainment. Toward the close of the 1985 luncheon, French, Russian, and Norwegian songs were offered and, as has long been the custom,

NICARAGUAN SHRIMP SALAD

10 oz. package frozen peas defrosted
 8 oz. small shrimp pre-cooked
 2 strips of bacon cooked to a crisp
 1 cup sliced ripe olives
 1/4 cup chopped green onion
 1 cup diced celery
 1/4 cup minced fresh parsley
 1 tsp. (or less) curry
 1 cup (or less) mayonnaise
 2 tbs. soy sauce
 1 tbs. lemon juice
 1/2 cup toasted slivered almonds

Combine first six ingredients. Blend the next four ingredients and add to the first mixture. Just before serving, toss in the toasted slivered almonds.

Luncheon

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there was recorded music for social dancing. The latter activity is clearly a highlight for many though, as several instructors complained, it is limited by the fact that there are "too few men on this faculty."

These changes in the non-culinary dimensions of the International Luncheon are a subject for mild controversy within the school. Some instructors are quite satisfied with the "new look" while others long for a return to the more ambitious parties of the "old days." Faculty members do agree, however, that there is an underlying set of reasons for the success of this party that makes such differences inconsequential. Moreover, they think this rationale is so compelling that the luncheon is likely to be a highpoint of life at the Language School for at least another 25 years. Among the reasons most often cited is the idea that the diversity inherent in the Language School demands a unifying event of this sort. In essence, these folks believe that if the luncheon didn't already exist, the dynamics of the institution would demand that it be invented.

Another theme frequently encountered when asking about the rationale for the luncheon's longstanding success is that it constitutes a unique opportunity to express pride in—and receptivity to—the broad variety of foreign cultures represented in the school. A variant on this thought was expressed by several others who noted how important it was—especially at the holiday season—to be able to touch base with one's traditions in the company of good friends and colleagues.

Yet another rationale was espoused by some instructors, especially those who valued the participation of senior Agency officials in the luncheon. They see this event as a rare opportunity to call attention to the contributions foreign language training makes to the success of the Agency's mission. It is a way of showing pride in a professional career. Such an annual affirmation is especially important to those who feel that Language School instructors will always remain something of an anomaly among CIA personnel because they are foreign born. They have set themselves apart from their former countrymen not only by taking American citizenship, but by making the US intelligence service their employer. For those who hold this view, the International Luncheon is not only an important affirmation of heritage, but of a belief that they have done the right thing by becoming a part of an elite language faculty in the service of their adopted country.

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65